

HOLIDAY SURPRISE RECIPE

INGREDIENTS:

POETRY

BY

Monty Breckenridge, Christopher Andrew Clark,
Myleah M. Denman, Laurie Evans, John L. Ford,
Edith Head, Christi Long, Mike L. Mallory,
Greg Prewitt, Randall Simmons, Dorothy Speck,
Roger Staggs, David Kirk Swenson, Steven L. Wood

SHORT FICTION

BY

Myleah M. Denman, Mark R. Mulik

PHOTOGRAPHY

BY

Joe Angeles, Laurie Evans, Connie L. Everitt,
Mary Hanewinkel, Stan Miesner, Mark R. Mulik

ARTWORK

BY

Randall Simmons

BOOK REVIEWS

BY

Brenda Cates Kilby

DIRECTIONS:

MIX: Mix all ingredients in a small office.

ADD: Add creative, expensive, and impractical design ideas.

SHAKE: Shake ingredients and ideas well until your mind is about to snap.

SHAPE: Smooth out and shape mixture on 18-by-24-inch sheets of paper for at least 30 hours.

PRAY: Then, pray that things turn out well.

Vol. IV, No. III
Tuesday, Dec. 13, 1988

A supplement of The Chart
Missouri Southern State College
Joplin, Mo. 64801-1595



AVALON

is

Missouri Southern's
Monthly Art and
Literary Magazine

A Missouri College
Newspaper Association
Awarding-Winning
Publication

Editor

Mark R. Mulik

Assistant Editor

John L. Ford

Editorial Assistants

John Morris

Christopher Andrew Clark

Adviser

Chad D. Stebbins

Avalon, as a supplement of *The Chart*, is published by Missouri Southern State College's communications department. It serves as a laboratory experience to its staff and a forum for writers, artists, and photographers at Missouri Southern.

Persons wanting to submit material (artwork, photographs, short stories, essays, and poetry) may do so by dropping it by *The Chart* office, Room 117, Heames Hall.

Avalon will only publish submissions from students, faculty members, or staff members at Missouri Southern.

Artwork and photographs submitted must be ready for publication. Size alterations may be made on such pieces in order to make the material fit within *Avalon's* pages. Literary material submitted must be in a legible format (typewritten is preferred).

Error-ridden literature submissions may be returned to the author for correction prior to publication. *Avalon* makes it its policy to correct typographical and grammatical errors within literature submissions.

Avalon accepts monetary contributions.

Avalon claims one-time publication rights to work appearing in its pages.

Volume IV, Number III
December 13, 1988

COVER ART

ARTWORK BY
JOHN MORRIS

DESIGN BY
MARK R. MULIK

**THE SUBMISSION
DEADLINE** for the
next issue of
Avalon is noon,
Friday, Jan. 20.

BABYLON

It often seems I'm very outgoing about getting submissions, and that's probably because I'm the editor of this publication and I believe it's my duty to drum up submissions. But many times in the past, when I have asked friends and acquaintances to submit their photographs, short stories, and what-have-you, they have replied: "Why don't you submit something?"—implying that if I would be brave enough to submit my own work, they would, in turn, submit work of their own. This question has made me do some thinking ever since I've been heavily involved with *Avalon*.

Mike E. Prater, my co-editor throughout last year, seemed to believe that we should not submit our own work because...because—well, I can't remember the reason. So last year, we did not submit our own work on purpose that is, but it got published anyway. Just to fill up 12 pages for the April 1988 edition, one of Mike's short stories was published. Also in that issue and in the March 1988 edition, short stories by Dharmendra Patel, our assistant editor, were published. We let Dharmendra submit his stories because we thought he should be exempt from this submission barrier we, as co-editors, had put up in front of ourselves, since he was just our assistant. (Dhar, if you're reading this, stop gritting your teeth.) Also, in the November 1987 edition, Mike, Dhar, and I wrote poetry to fill space. Mike's and Dhar's poems were better than mine, and as we only needed two poems to fill the volume, I opted not to complain too much and just run their poems.

I guess I don't think it's a crime for me to submit my own work. And just to prove it, I've submitted a short story and accompanying photograph (see "A MIND OF ITS OWN," pages 15-19). In the spring of 1987, I submitted a corny poem called "Fast Food," which ended up being published. In November 1987, I submitted a photograph I had taken of an ice- and snow-covered evergreen tree, which ended up being published.

Now, I know what some of you are thinking. You're thinking that since I'm the editor, anything I submit will be published. My attitude on that is that since I'm the editor and since I want this publication to be an excellent one, I won't submit anything crass, tasteless, or unworthy (like short stories I wrote in the sixth grade or out-of-focus photographs that I took when I first started taking photographs). I suppose I could easily abuse this "power" I have as editor by telling myself I'm going to take my own load of unworthy work and submit it and, as I'm the "all-powerful" editor of this publication, I'll go ahead and publish that load of unworthy work. But I see no purpose in that other than attempting to degrade and, perhaps, ruin this publication.

Now, as a rule—a rule which has been stamped across many of *Avalon's* editorial pages—*Avalon* accepts all submissions. Of course, there's a hitch—well, there are a number of hitches: 1) the person who submits the material must attach his or her name to that material; 2) no literary material containing words considered worse than "crap," "damn," or "hell" will be printed with the inclusion of such words (consult "Babylon" in the October 1988 edition).

See "More Babylon,"

page 7

BOOK REVIEWS

BY BRENDA CATES KILBY
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Gunslinger (Signet, 1982), 224 pages, in paperback, \$10.95; *The Tommyknockers* (Signet, 1987), 747 pages, in paperback, \$5.95. Both by Stephen King.

Since a Stephen King novel is to a horror junkie what a banana split is to an ice cream lover, there will be a lot of bingeing going on this holiday season. Two of King's novels have recently hit the stands in paperback form, which is the mating call to millions of gleefully terrified fans who can't afford to buy the hardbound versions.

The first of these, *The Gunslinger*, has never been widely circulated. Released in 1982 as a limited edition for collectors, this novel is really five short stories which appeared separately in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* from 1978-81. It is also the first part of a series of novels called *The Dark Tower*, with a second part due out next spring.

For the first time, a paperback King has come with color illustrations. Michael Whelan, the artist, has captured in gory detail some of the finer moments of murder, death, and fear to accompany each chapter.

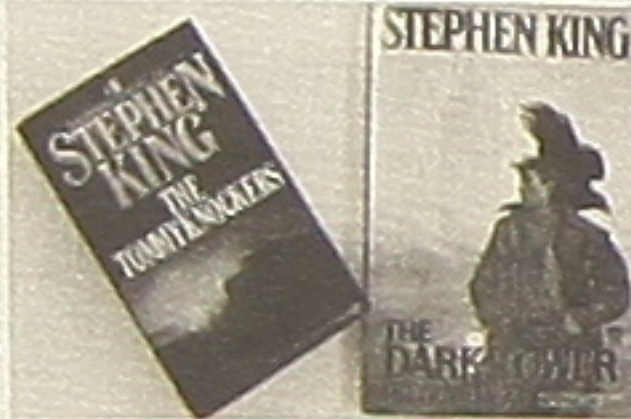
Die-hard readers of King will recognize some of the characters in this book, who are reprised from former stories and novels but changed a little. One of those is

Randall Flagg, "the man in black," who earlier appeared as "the walkin' dude" in King's *The Stand*. Here, Mr. Flagg is named Roland and is chased by the Gunslinger in a surrealistic landscape where evil, once again, faces the forces of good. The ending takes a surprise turn, however, and has the added sweetness of a deft hook to lure the reader into buying the next installment.

The second release is *The Tommyknockers*, which came out in hardbound in 1987. Although it is 747 pages long, in small print, reading goes fast, and its size is no indication of its worthiness. The storyline is interesting, and the characters are, true to usual form, believable and likeable, especially the women. There is one big disappointment, however: for the first time, King has put outerspace aliens in one of his books. It's enough to make a person wonder if King has been keeping company with Whitley Streiber (*Communion*) lately. (At least King didn't try to pass this off as a non-fiction the way Streiber did.)

The plot of *The Tommyknockers* centers around a small, sleepy town in (you got it!) Maine, called Haven. Bobbi Anderson, a late thirtyish writer of pulp westerns, accidentally uncovers the edge of a spaceship in her woods one afternoon. Driven by a force she is never to fully comprehend, she works around the clock to unearth the ship. Meanwhile, all hell breaks loose.

Both of these books are good reading, especially for Stephen King aficionados. For those who have one or two of those among their friends, one of these (or both) would be excellent holiday gifts. However, neither of these is his best novel. If you've never read Stephen King before, start with something scarier. Come out of that dark closet you've been in all these years and buy a copy of his short story anthology, *Night Shift*, or read *Carrie*, both of which are available in paperback at your local bookstores. Oh, yeah—and don't read them at night when you're home alone.



Just Killing Time

When one is feeling lonely
He does not want to hear

A word of patience whispered
To his aching ear.

It is hard to describe the pain
That time can create

But a very special friend told me
Just hold on and wait

At first, I took it as an insult
Because it was very hard to bear.

But I took the thought inside my mind
And let it linger there.

The memory of what you told me
comes back when I'm feeling low

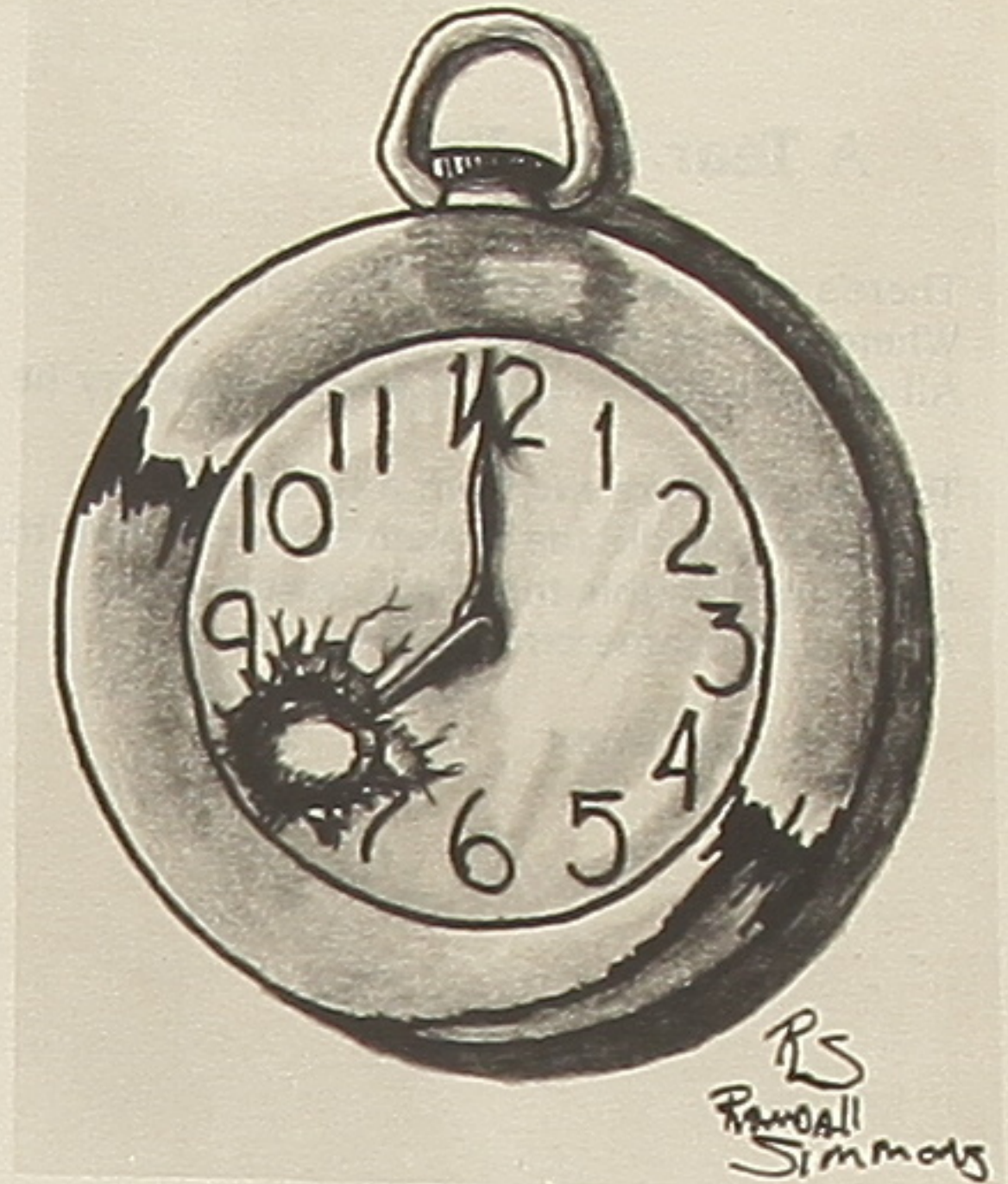
For this I'd like to thank you, my friend
You've helped me more than you know

But until the perfect woman comes
So we can start on life's exciting climb

I am going to take your advice, my
friend. I'll just sit back and

Kill some time.

Randall Simmons



A Dirge

Softly it blows
Like a smooth April wind
Quickly it goes
Like the season of fall
Gently it began
With light and with love
Onward it ran
To an unknown end
The tree grows older
The land changes shape
The songbird grows bolder
The wind continues to rape
The sails fill
The motion begins
The waves gently trill
Soon it is gone
Now is forgotten
As never has been
No one has lost
No one will win

David Kirk Swenson

Perfection

Are we so perfect?
Of that no one can be sure,
Yet, we put ourselves
In the place to decide, if
Someone else is or is not.

Roger Staggs

A Tear For You

There's a break across the meadow
Where a lonesome bird sings—
All day and into the night his deperate cry he brings—

Tonight, he woke me from a troubled sleep
Trying to console the broken heart beneath his wings—
It's nights like this that I listen with a tear,
As that lonesome bird sings—

Steven L. Wood

Rainblues

I walked in the rain today
without you—
But you were there beside me,
Holding my trembling hand
in yours.
We did not talk, there
was no need,
The feelings in our hearts
were understood.
And as we walked, you did not
know I cried,
The rain mingling with the
salted tears.
And when you stopped and kissed
me tenderly,
I knew it was goodbye—
and not goodnight.

Myleah M. Denman

Touched By The Hand of God (Not the New Order)

Explosive lights that expose
the spectre of dance
and of movement
But those lights don't shine here
and I am left stagnate

They say that if the shoe fits
I must wear it
They also say my music does not fit
and that I must endure it

With a groove called Europop
that induces one to dance
I often hear the question
"Just who the hell are you?"
Just because I don't listen to
Sting, Springsteen, or even U2.

They make me sick of feeling guilty
for a world that is sad
And I don't need Tracy Chapman
to tell me things are bad.

I bet all those "Amnesty Tour"
human rights pretenders are feeling
mighty guilty as they cruise to
the bank.

Chistopher Andrew Clark

Nasal Spray

Woody Allen;
Klinger;
Primatine Mist
up the nose
feels good
when you're drunk.

Greg Prewitt

Mystical Manipulation

The hero, mystic and saint
Going through the automatic
Activities of the day

Problems arise, dramatized
When the mask fails to reflect
True feelings
When the task tells the doer
What he's doing

Blueprint for a new world
Insight into physical needs
Human motivation

Why we do what we do
Why we do what we do
Why we do what we do

Approach—approach
Approach—avoidance
Avoidance—avoidance

The hero, mystic and saint
Going through the automatic
Festivities of the day

Attitudes and attitude change
Bombarded by mass persuasion
Exploring the beliefs

Mike L. Mallory

Escape

Nature falls not upon the path man made,
the paths are only a taste.
As man calls to the wild that is near
he hides from his darkest fear.

Monty Breckenridge

Home Divided

A ship leaves the harbor in the mid of night—
On shore, a heartbroken man who could've
had it all watches with a tear,
As she slips out of sight.

Steven L. Wood

Untitled

thoughts scattered, unfocused
a million images free
floating through a
dozen levels of
consciousness

a million images superseded by
one predominant

shattering glass, innumerable shards
each reflecting a million
facets of a single image
focusing slowly
strange—with
focus comes
supreme
Confusion

Myleah M. Denman

This thing called loneliness

When will it end?

The night that seems to last forever.

That seems to remain clouded in darkness.

Never allowing us to see the light of the day.

It's an endless quiet that can drive you insane.

It's an awful thing called loneliness.

And when you feel this thing called loneliness.

You wish for life, your life, to end.

For to continue living would be insane.

To allow ourselves to be tortured forever,

Only ruins the beauty of the day.

And would only keep us in darkness.

So why do those you call 'friends' so often leave you in darkness?

Do they not comprehend this thing called loneliness?

Do they know the emptiness felt throughout the duration of the day?

Do they know you hope for your life end?

That sadly you know it will continue and torture you forever?

Do they know how it make you insane?

Or are they the ones who are insane?

Are they the ones whose minds are clouded in darkness?

Is it they who seek to torture others forever.

They leave you to this thing called loneliness.

Liars, who profess, but do not possess friendship are without end.

They are as common as the day.

They create the pains we feel throughout the day.

Those who would stay with these creatures are truly insane.

Such horrid creatures deserve to meet an equally horrid end.

For they feed upon us and are servants to the darkness.

It is their only real weapon, this thing called loneliness.

Without it they would be harmless and ignored forever.

But it gains our attentions and keeps it, forever.

And it is the terror of any day.

And it is the horror of any night, this thing called loneliness.

It is the disease of the insane.

An affliction to us all, when we are clouded in darkness.

Its victims are without end.

The torture that will not end is horrible and forever.

It will reach in the darkness and even in the day.

Thankfully, we are all, a little insane, it is all that helps us to survive this thing called loneliness.

Roger Staggs

Untitled

Is life real? Darkness presses,
half-truth substitutes, gasp for air.

Sinking.

Falling.

Wondering.

How can I live?

Material, tangible, so easy to see.

Deceiving, whispering, laughing at us.

Ephemeral power, not withstanding

time; joy for only a season.

Hollow hearts, unknowledgeable
minds.

Rationalize,

water down.

Enemy of God, Ignorance oppresses.

Christi Long

Untitled

If you were to loan the sunset
Just one ounce of your beauty
It would pay for an eternity
And never even the debt.

Steven L. Wood

Priestess of the Most High

I met a jazz giant
a classy client of Mr. Clown
I bet a bottom dollar
a sassy answer is all I received
from the lolli-pop legged queen
when I asked where she'd been
she said she'd been down town
dreaming with Fu Man Chu
the world can not be moved
in the land of Nod
Nim-Rod is a mighty one

Pleasant to the eyes
now that you're here
now that you're wise
Kings of people shall be of her
Priestess of the most high

Sent forth a raven
sent forth a dove
An everlasting possession
for the one who knew love

I met a jazz giant
a classy client of Mr. Clown
See the bow in the clouds
is only a token
trashy loud and broken

A deep sleep fell upon him
long before he could cry
He left a note on his saxophone
for the priestess of the most high

Mike L. Mallory

I wish, I wish

I wish, I wish
With all my heart
I wish, I wish
Upon any charm or star
I wish, I wish
It's not that hard
I wish, I wish
But it's just broken shards
Because I wish, I wish
For someone's heart
...I wish, I wish

Roger Staggs

More Babylon, *continued from page 2*

tion for further information on this hitch); 3) literary material containing numerous typographical and grammatical errors may be returned to the writer for corrections; 4) submitted photographs that are out of focus, too light or too dark, and/or of poor contrast may be rejected unless the photographer can explain why the said work is of artistic quality (i.e. "It's out of focus on purpose.") and is therefore worthy of publication; 5) on artwork submissions, pencil sketches will most likely be rejected on the grounds that the reproduction quality of such material in newsprint is normally very poor; and 6) on artwork submissions, don't submit material you don't even consider artistic yourself (I don't find humor in submissions of this nature).

With these amendments to the "We take all submissions" rule in mind, I'll describe to you a true situation which caused the rejection of submissions. I remember around Groundhog Day of this year I received a hideous sketch of a groundhog which had been photocopied and then submitted. The person who drew this so-called groundhog was trying to pull off a cruel joke on me. This sketch was accompanied by several poems. I didn't find anything wrong with the poems, so I assumed they weren't meant as a joke. Unfortunately, I couldn't run the poems either, since the poet did not attach a name to his or her submissions. "Snooky's Stuff" was typed on the top of front page of poetry. Let's face it, these were anonymous submissions, and I couldn't accept them on the grounds that they were anonymous.

I'm not meaning to publicly embarrass this Snooky person. What am I talking about? How can publicly embarrass a person who remains anonymous? I can't. Actually, if this Snooky person re-submitted his or her poetry with his or her real name attached, I wouldn't recognize it, since I threw the original submissions away (they were done on dot-matrix, so Snooky probably still has them on file somewhere).

So, Snooky, step forward and re-submit that work (and take responsibility for it by attaching your name to it).

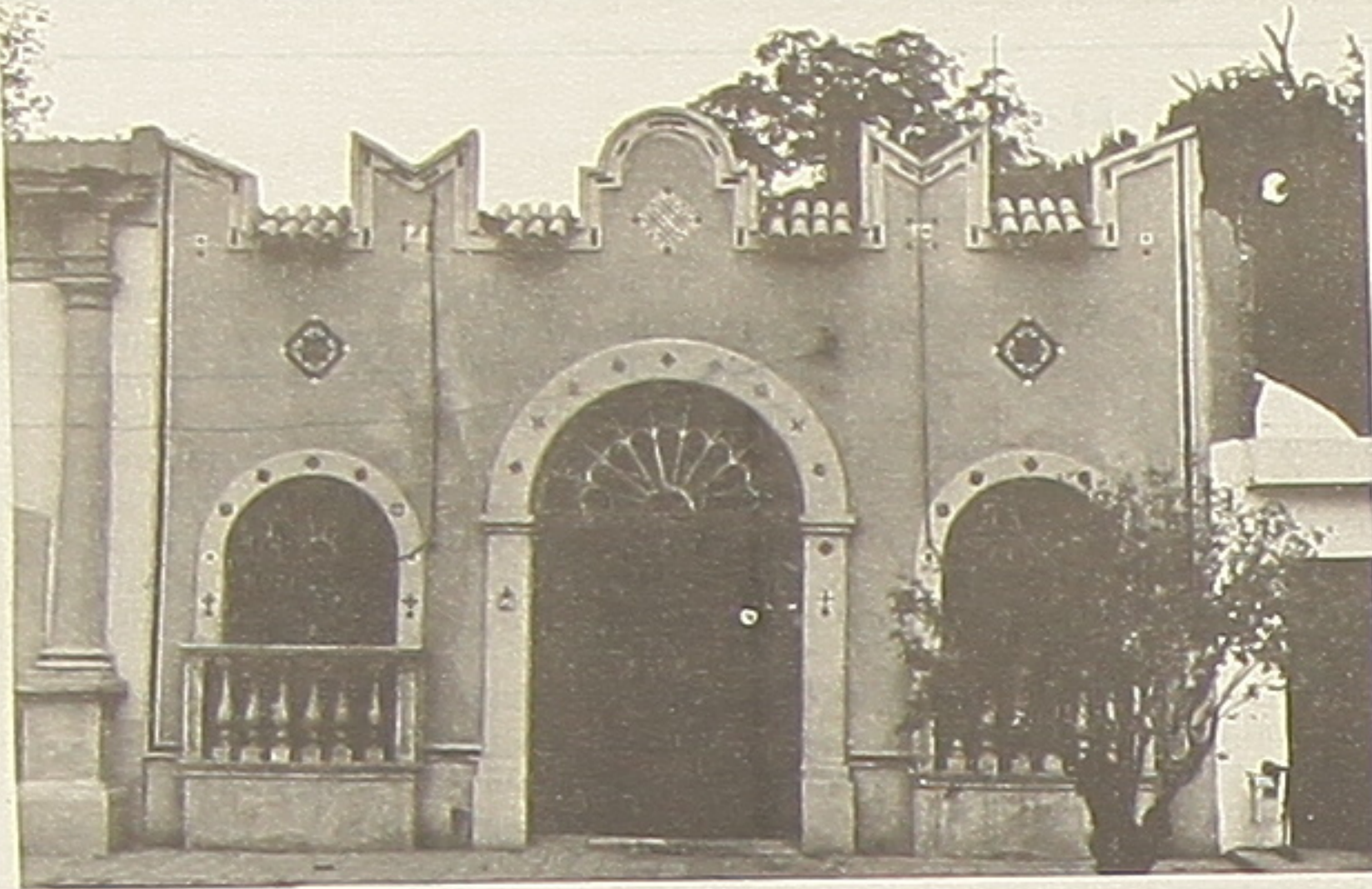
And now that I have submitted my own work, and now that every member of Avalon's staff has submitted work in this issue or the last issue, what's your excuse for not submitting your artwork, photography, literature, and poetry? I'm talking to everyone I know and everyone I don't know, too. I'm talking to you faculty members, too. And yes, you administrators, too. And you staff members, as well. Why not?

Mike R. Mallory

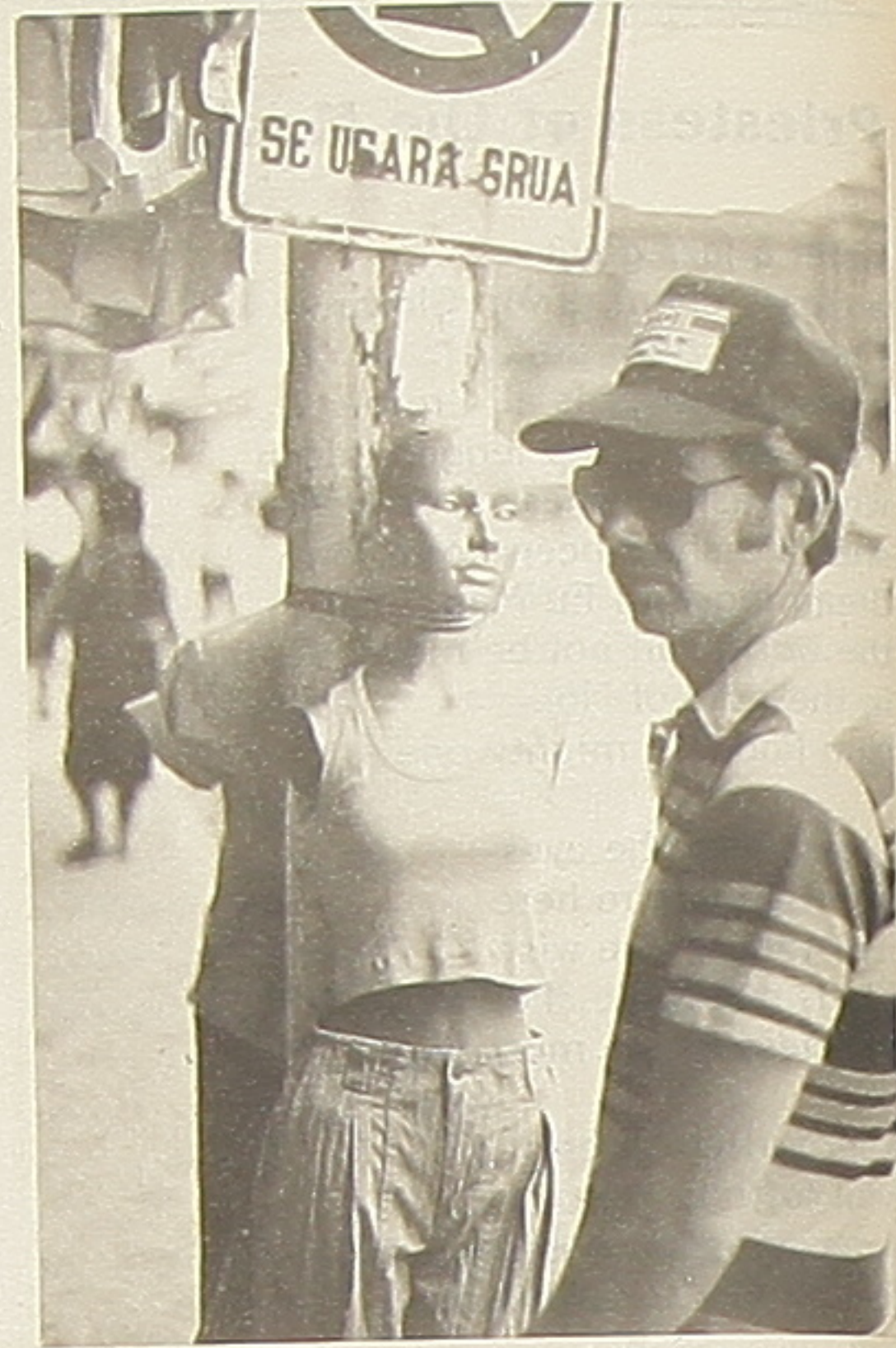
Always

Always angry for things I can't say
Always been easier for me to write it down this way
Always afraid of what you might hear
Always afraid that you won't care
Everywhere you go I'm always not far behind
Always hoping you'll turn and see me there sometime
Always glad you're at least a small part of my life
Wanting always for your part to grow in size
Always seem to get depressed
Always when I find out you've left
I'm always told I'm just a 'friend'
Always praying that I'll never hear that word again
Always when happiness is in my grasp
It always seems to slip away so fast
Always I hope to see
A day when you will come and always stay with me
I always wonder when that will be

Roger Staggs



Stan Miesner



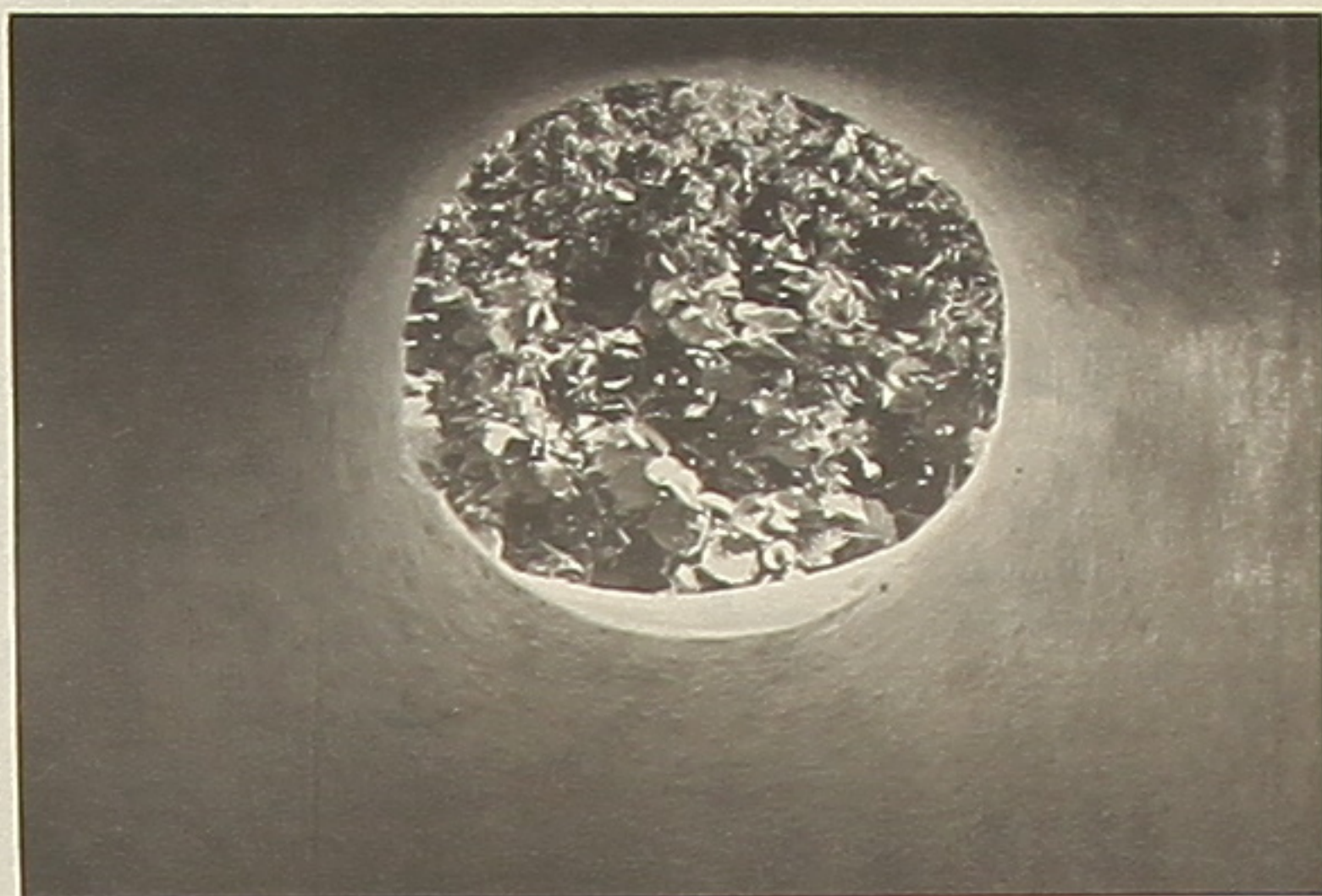
Stan Miesner



Stan Miesner



Connie L. Everitt



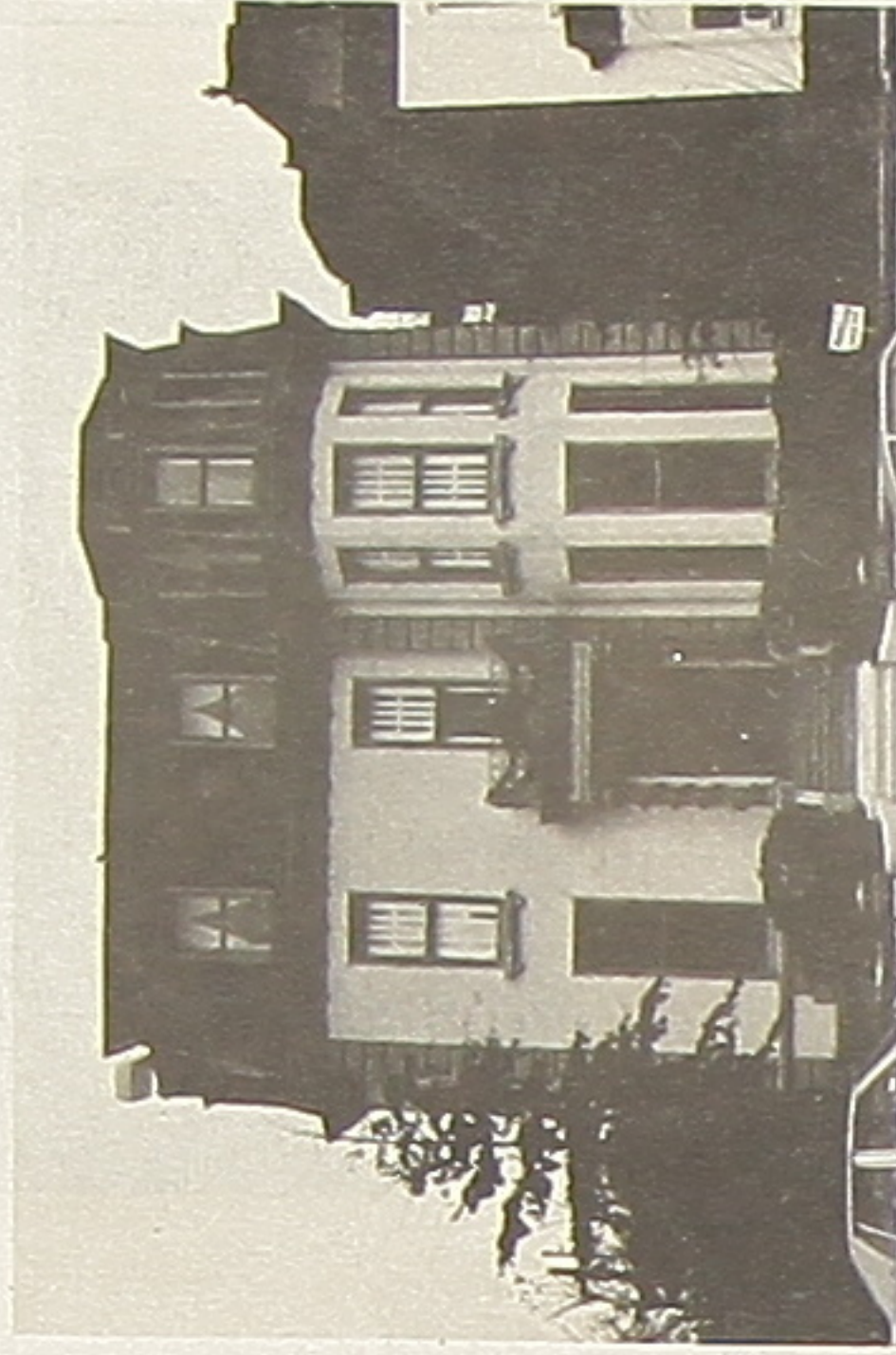
Photography
by
Stan Miesner





Mary Hanewinkel

GO AROUND THE
TOWER



Mary Hanewinkel

Thoughts at Christmas

Dear is the spirit of Christmas past,
Filled with the scent of fresh-cut pine
Remember now—the new-fallen snow,
The caroling bells?...

Until at last, gone was the hearthfire's ruddy glow.

Christmas, season of love, renews
Life's hope, dimmed by grief and care.
I'll keep my Christmas candle lit—
Though dreams be lost,

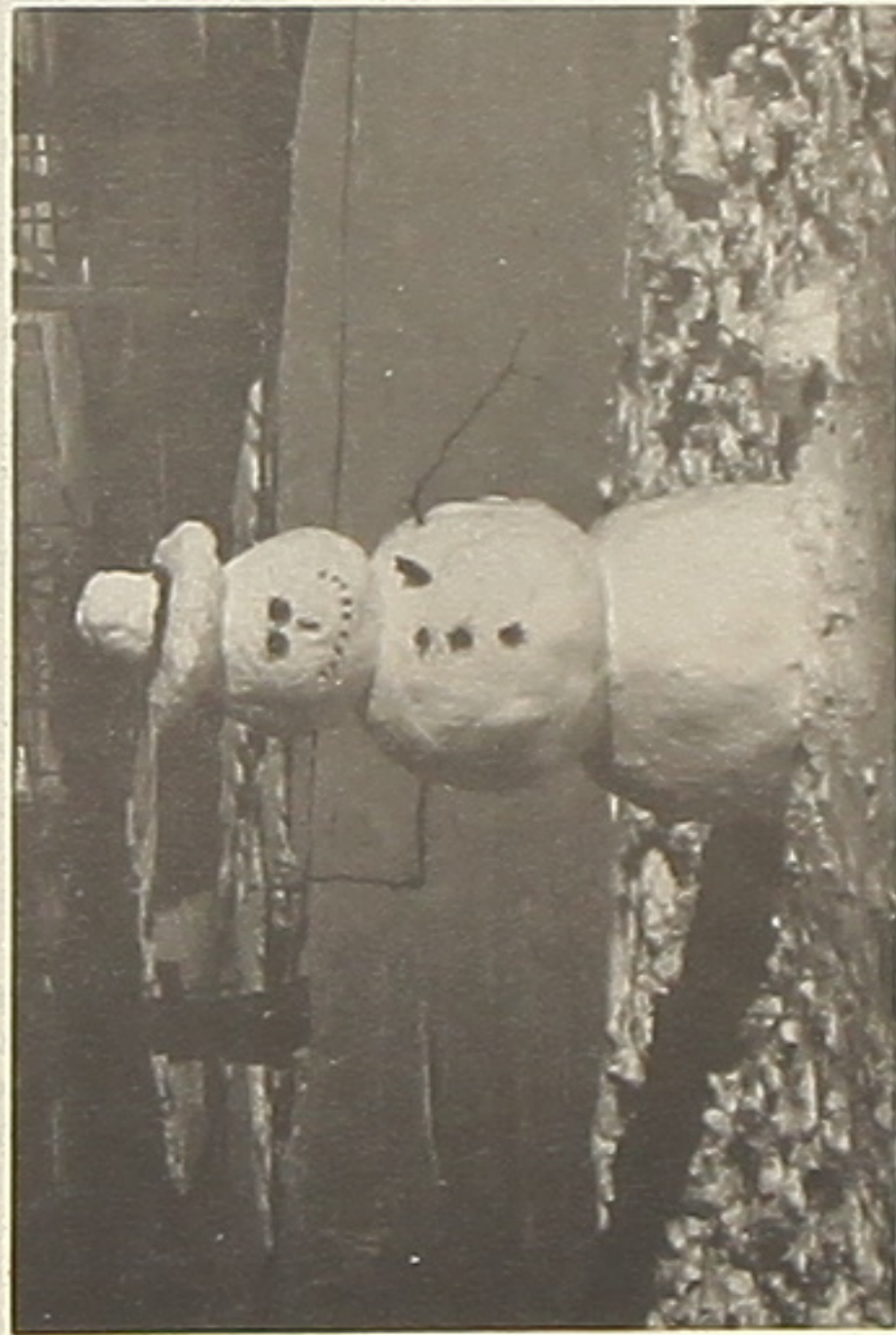
I would not lose a friendship nor a kindred spirit.

As Christmastime again draws near
Our thoughts are of years to come.



Our thoughts are of years to come.
May peace and love on earth abound,
And e'er with courage,
Hope, and cheer, may the laughter of our love resound.

Dorothy Speck



Mary Hanewinkel



Mary Hanewinkel



Stan Miesner

A Christmas Visitor

I was walking alone one night
It was a snowy Christmas Eve
When a shabbily-dressed man in ragged clothes
Reached up and touched my sleeve

"Excuse me, sir," he said to me.
"Can I disturb you for a minute?
You see, times are hard and it's Christmastime,
All my energy I have spent."

I said I couldn't really help him,
My budget was spartan, my wallet bare.
But he said he didn't need money,
Just someone who would care.

We walked together and talked awhile,
About life, work, and many different things.
Then he shrugged and gave a smile,
And flew away on gossamer wings.

I've often wondered about that odd, old man,
Where he came from and who he was,
Was he a man, an angel, or maybe even God?
Or was it Saint Nicholas?

John L. Ford

Random Access Memory

Previous knowledge gathered
Permanent records destroyed
Obvious words eliminated
Teachers unemployed

Conditions unreal
Positions unkind
Emotions concealed
By minds that unwind

Leave out the music
Substitute style
Random Access Memory
In the future file

Endless formulations
Tired and trusted
Useless information
Wired and rusted

Watch the drama unfold
Catch the trauma unfeeling
Search for wisdom
Make an honest living

Leave out the music
Substitute style
Random Access Memory
In the future file

Mike L. Mallory

Someone, somewhere

Someone, somewhere has nothing
Someone, somewhere has it all
Nothing is ever free
Someone, somewhere always pays a price
If you have received something for nothing
You are in debt to someone, somewhere

Roger Staggs

The Memory Tree

short fiction by Myleah M. Denman

The tree itself was not particularly impressive. Mother was always determined to find the perfect tree, one with just the right shape, height, and color, but she usually ended up choosing one which was considerably less than perfect. This tree was no exception to the tradition. After Daddy placed the tree on a wooden crate in the bay window, it became obvious that Mother had outdone her previous record for finding the ugliest tree possible. Not only was the poor thing several feet too short for our high ceilings, but the limbs were scrawny and the needles were more yellow than green. Forlorn as it was, we would simply have to make this little tree look as decent as we possibly could, and it seemed to us as if it would take a miracle to turn it into any kind of Christmas tree at all.

After Daddy had performed his annual chore of stringing the lights, Mother, Sister, and I plunged into the task of bedecking the branches with the assortment of ornaments our family had collected over the years. Sister and I carefully festooned the entire tree with the once bright blown-glass chains that had bejeweled the limbs of our great-grandmother's tree so many years ago. The bare spike of a branch at the top of the tree was carefully covered with the gold, sequin-winged angel which had been passed down by Grandma Helen when she moved from the big house to her small apartment. The robin's nest which Mother had saved for so many years was cradled on an inside branch where it could be easily seen. Already, our little tree seemed to stand a little taller, as if it were proud of the heritage we were allowing it to share.

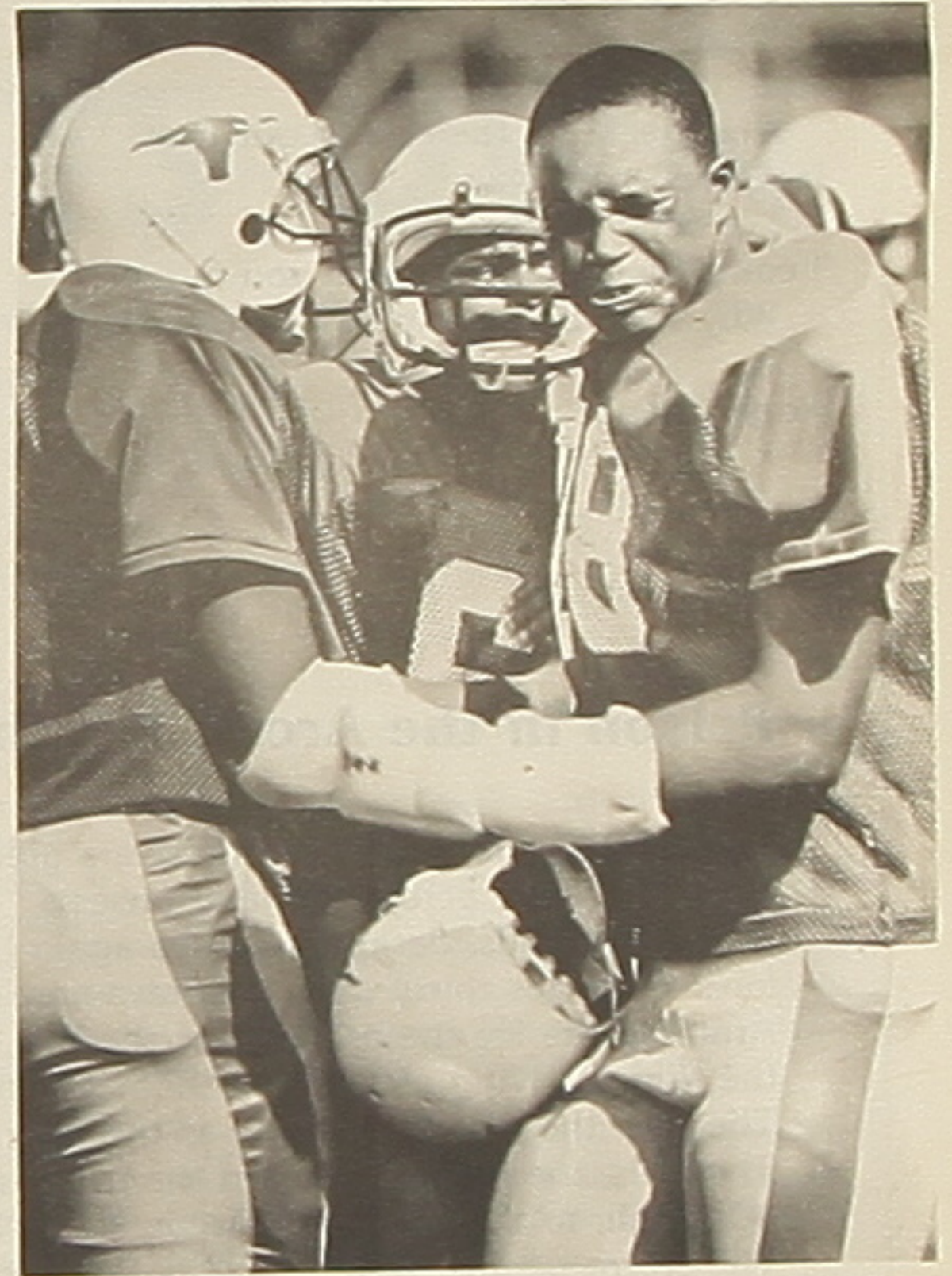
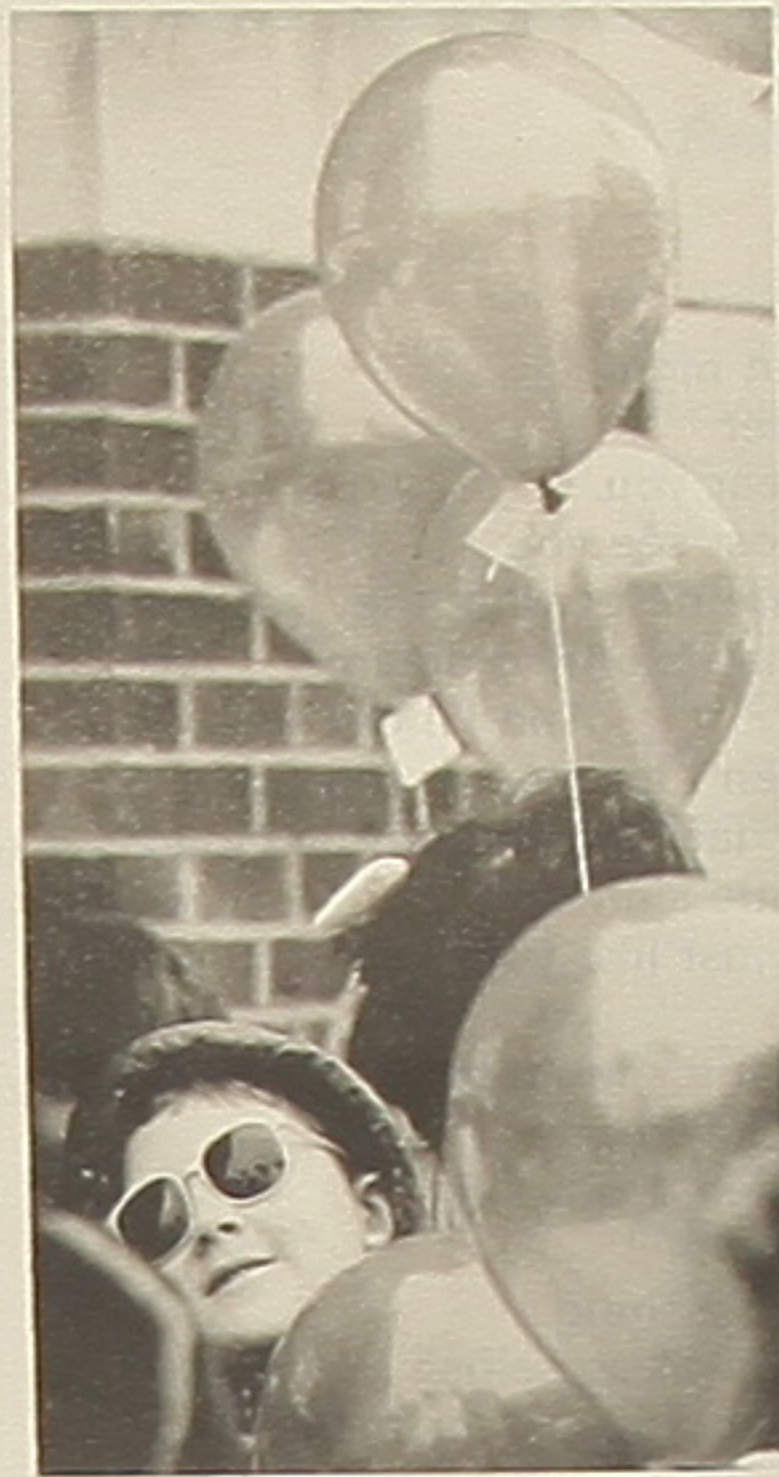
The next few hours were spent examining each ornament, recalling its history, and finding the proper place for it among the swiftly-filling branches. There seemed to be a special magic in each shining ball, every glittering bauble sent by loved ones from faraway places, and especially from the ornaments which had been made by hands that were now much larger: a glitter-sprinkled felt star I had made in Sunday school, Sister's toothless grin beaming from a glass bell made in Brownies, and dozens of similar priceless treasures. Mother reserved for herself the finishing touches of placing the gingham bows, leftovers from leaner years, on the ends of the longer boughs, and hanging the crystal icicles where they would best catch the light.

Our task completed, Mother turned out the lamp, and we followed her out of the room. Turning to take a look at our "imperfect" tree, I realized that a miracle had indeed taken place. Somehow, over the course of a few hours and generations of precious memories, an ugly, little pine tree was transformed into a majestic tribute to the joy of Christmases past, a celebration of Christmas present, and the beautiful promise of Christmases to come.



[Editor's Note: Avalon does not normally accept submissions from alumni. We believed these submissions would be legitimate exceptions to the rule that we would only accept work from students, faculty, or staff members, since the work submitted was of such quality to receive awards in Missouri Press Association competition.]

Joe Angeles, who took these photographs, is an alumnus of Missouri Southern State College and former executive manager of *The Chart*. (Top left) "Grimacing Griffin," which won second place in sports photography for weekly newspapers, is of members of the losing team of the Mid-States High School Hockey Championships. (Top right) "Eye On The Sky," which won second place for feature photography for weeklies, is of a St. Louis second-grader who is keeping his eye on the balloons at a Valentine's Day balloon launch. (Bottom right) "You Gotta Be Kidding," which won first place for sports photography for weeklies, is of a high school football player who strongly disagrees with being flagged for grabbing an opponent's facemask.



Photography by Joe Angeles

Last touch

A quiet cry that carries from the darkness through.
 Silent tears never heard by cold, deaf ears.
 A gentle whisper that echoes loudly.
 Screaming out, "I'll miss you."
 Breeding bitter-sweet memories!
 The joy of holding another's hand
 To feel a warm, gentle palm pressed tightly to your own.
 To feel another's fingers wrapped around yours caressing them.
 So much love expressed in that tiny touch.
 How little we notice that small show of affection?
 Yet, when at last your hand is empty it hurts so much!

Roger Staggs

Autumn

Flamboyant
 She strolls on stage
 Dressed in vibrant
 Shades of scarlet
 Yellows glowing lights
 Dancing in the sun
 Rich brown holding
 Golden glimmers
 Tinged with orange
 Fading greens
 She performs in a
 Fantasy world
 Before an awestruck
 Audience
 Premature loneliness
 Seize the heart
 For when the curtain falls
 The light fades
 She is gone

Edith Head

A MIND OF ITS OWN

SHORT FICTION
 BY
 MARK R. MULIK

ONE

John and Mary Greene were good people. They came to the country from the big city, deciding they did not want their unborn children to grow up in the bustle of city life.

John had never lived anywhere but Boston and had always wondered how people in little towns like Alford, Massachusetts, lived. That's where one of his grandfathers was from, his father had told him. *Why not*, he'd thought. *Why not move out there and see what country life is all about?* John had visited Alford once as a child and had thought it cheerful enough—more cheerful than Boston.

Mary was from the country, some small town in Minnesota, and it had originally been her idea that they move to the country. Once she had convinced John that was the best thing for them, he had acted like he thought of the idea, saying they should get a little cot-

tage away from the mess of civilization. He had said they should try this little New England town. Mary didn't really care where they moved, for she was plenty ready to get out of Boston. *Why not?* she had asked herself.

They had found a the "perfect" house. It was a seventy-five-year-old, ten-room cottage with twenty tree-covered acres. It had electricity but no gas. There was a phone hook-up, which they employed immediately, but no cable for a TV. They could be satisfied here.

John had been a successful financial consultant and had made a bundle. Successfully playing the stock market helped, too. They paid for the house in one payment, and still had over \$300,000 in the bank. They were still young: John was thirty and Mary was twenty-eight, but they figured they would retire, for the present, and have children.

...

The day they moved in, Mary told John she thought something seemed different about the

place.

"Different?" he queried. "How do you mean different?"

"Oh, I don't know....just different." She couldn't quite place it.

"I don't see anything different," he said, teasing her, while he parked the Subaru wagon in the midday shade of a huge, leafy oak that sat next to the cottage. "I guess we'll have to make do without a garage." He opened the car door and jumped out. "C'mon, let's move in."

...

The sun had sunk past the horizon by the time they were sufficiently moved in. Oh, yes, John told himself, as he looked about his new house, *this will be great!*

A broad window in the dining room gave a spectacular view of the front yard, the dirt driveway (Well, you can't have everything, John

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thought) and the countryside beyond. Another huge window in the living room gave yet another spectacular view—of a hill leading down to a handsome grove of trees.

Exhausted from getting up early, moving out, driving hundreds of miles, and moving in, the couple took its rest.

TWO

"John?" Mary called from somewhere in the house. "John, are you up yet?"

John tried to wrap a pillow around his ears. "No, I'm not up," he muttered.

The master bedroom's door opened a crack. "Oh, you're still asleep," she mumbled, flinging the door wide. "John, remember what I said about something being different about this house? Different from when it was when we visited last week?"

"Yes, what about it?" he grumbled from under his pillow. He looked up at her.

"There's a tree in the front yard," she said.

"Of course, there's a tree in the front yard," he nearly exclaimed. "But that's plural—trees."

"No, no," she hastened to correct herself. "I mean there's a tree out in front that I don't remember being there."

John wrinkled his brow, confused. He rose from the bed and wrapped a robe about himself. "What are your talking about?" He looked out the bedroom window. It overlooked the side yard. He stalked out of the room, frustrated. Mary was on his heels.

John looked out the dining room window. He was surprised that sunlight wasn't streaming through the window, for the window faced east, and it was morning. A huge oak tree blocked the sun's light and warmth from the cottage that sat behind it.

"Hmmm," he mumbled. "I wonder why we didn't notice that before..."

"Well, if it was there before or even if it wasn't—which doesn't seem likely," she added, not at all looking confused, "I don't want it there now. Get rid of it, so we can enjoy sunlit mornings."

"It is quite a pretty tree. Must be old, too," he said, admiring the arching branches and tremendous trunk of the tree that was not thirty feet distant. "I could get along with—"

"No, John, get rid of it," she demanded.

He gave in. "Okay, Hon," he muttered, unhappy. His grim look changed to a grin. "Hey,

I can make a day of it. I'll go into town and get a chainsaw and a bunch of rope...and maybe a wheelbarrow."

"You'll hurt yourself," she said worriedly. She wasn't confident of his abilities as any kind of lumberjack.

"Oh, no, I won't," he told her, smiling. "It'll be fun. I can't say I've ever chopped a tree down before."

"Well, if you're going to do it," Mary started, "then do it today. Pretty or not, I don't like that tree."



A huge, old, leafy oak tree

Photography by Mark R. Mulik

So, John got the checkbook and went to the car. He found it in the open, at the end of the drive. "How..." he started but fell silent, thinking, *How did it get here? I could have sworn I parked it in the shade.* He looked around for the shade tree. There wasn't a tree within fifty feet of the station wagon.

"Hmph," he uttered. *Maybe Mary took the car out earlier this morning.* "Dammit!" he cursed suddenly, as he noticed the left front tire was flat.

He changed the flat, cursing and groaning only slightly. He pulled a flat, sharp stone from the ruined tire. He growled at the stone and threw it as far away from the driveway as he could.

Finally, John went into town. He bought an expensive chainsaw and gassed it up. He got

a three-gallon gas can and filled it up, too. He bought fifty feet of rope to tie around the tree and pull it so that it might fall away from the house. He browsed around the hardware store for an hour, picking up miscellaneous things: two pairs of work gloves, some overalls, work boots, an axe, and a wheelbarrow (to haul away the wood), of course.

He was decked out in his work clothes: gloves, boots, and all, as he stood several paces from the tree, holding the chainsaw.

He powered it up. *Grrrowl-oww!* "Now, this is going to be fun!" he exclaimed over the growl of the saw.

As John approached the oak, Mary sat watching him from the front porch. He gunned the engine and pointed it toward the base of the trunk.

A sudden gust of wind caused acorns to rain down on him. One struck him in the eye, and he shrieked. He let loose of the chainsaw and sprung away from it, instinctively grabbing at his left eye. He stumbled over backward and landed in a heap.

He pulled his hand away and tried to use the damaged eye. Vision was fuzzy, and opening and closing the eye was painful. "Owww!" he howled.

Mary rushed to his aid. "Oh, John..." *I told you so,* she would tell him later.

He was not bleeding, but he was definitely bruised. "Dammit. What happened?" he asked, looking at her worried face as she sat across from him on the ground.

"I don't know," she replied, completely unhelpful.

"I don't remember it being windy here...that gust..." he mumbled. He was not able

to piece things together.

They went inside. Mary forced him to lie down, while she nursed his eye. She made lunch for him and fed it to him in bed, as if he were a child.

Well, John was thinking as he looked (with his good eye) at Mary's pretty face, *a lot I managed to get done today.*

THREE

The next morning, John got up before Mary, hoping to get an early start on the tree. He rooted around in the kitchen, which adjoined the dining room on the west side, looking for breakfast. After thinking about fixing eggs, bacon, and toast, he settled for a bowl of Wheaties and some juice: his laziness trait winning out.

It was a beautiful morning, and, as John sat at the dining room table and started eating his cereal, he wished he had the morning paper. Then he reminded himself he had to give up the morning paper because it was part of the bustle of the civilization he and Mary were trying to avoid.

He squinted in the early morning sunlight. His left eye was nearly swollen shut. He had not thought one acorn could do that much damage—but it had. "I guess if I want not to be blinded in both eyes, I'll have to get up and close the—" he broke off in mid-sentence as he realized something was not quite right, "—curtains," he finished. He leaped up from his chair, scrambling toward the window like a man possessed by insanity. John's knees slammed into the underside of the table, and his nearly-full cereal bowl dumped its contents all over the hand-crafted table and chairs and his lap.

"Ugh!" he grunted. He shoved the table away from him and ran to the window, rapidly scanning the front yard. "Mary!!!" he bellowed.

He had awoken her moments earlier when he was bumping around the kitchen. But now, she was out of bed and running toward the kitchen at full speed, thinking her beloved husband had hurt himself while fixing breakfast.

"Mary! It's gone! The damned thing's gone!" John was yelling.

She entered the dining room, thinking he had done into hysterics. ("Has he ever gone hysterical?" She was remembering what the family doctor had asked her once. The doctor had told her John suffered from mild hypertension, though he had never told John about it.) "Get a hold of yourself, Honey," she said as she got a hold of him.

"Look, Mary," he pointed out the window.

"Yes, Hon," she went along with his 'fit of insanity.' "It's a beautiful morning, John. I don't see anything worth yelling about."

"Of course not!" he yelled, shaking out of her hold. "I don't see anything either!"

She looked him in the eye, literally, and asked, "John, you haven't been smoking that dope again, have you?"

"Dope?" he asked, quite perturbed. "Maybe I should ask you about dope—that is, about your being one." He took hold of her and faced her toward the window. "Where's the tree, Mary?"

Her jaw dropped. She was speechless.

"The tree, Mary, tell where that damned thing went!" he demanded.

She shook him off. "I don't know where it went, Mr. Greene! What're you asking me for?"

John tried to calm himself, having realized who he was yelling at. He scurried past her out of the room and blew through the front door.

The tree was nowhere to be seen. The front yard was as empty as it had been when they had first visited the place.

Mary was on the front porch, next to him. "Something was different alright," she mumbled, her face drained of expression.

"Witchcraft," John breathed. "I always thought those stories were kidstuff," he added quietly, as if afraid to speak.

"Nonsense, John. There's no such thing," Mary told him. "But, whatever the case, the tree's gone, and—Look, John," she pointed to where the tree was supposedly rooted the day before, "there isn't even a hole there or anything."

They stood silently for a moment. John seemed to anticipate the tree's return within five minutes. *Like, maybe we're just seeing things right now,* he pondered.

Mary returned to the house, shrugging off the phenomenon as if it were nothing.

"Witchcraft," John breathed. "I always thought those stories were kidstuff," he added quietly, as if afraid to speak.

John was not so easily persuaded that it was just "nothing." He walked around the cottage to the side yard where the car was parked. "Maybe I *did* park in the shade," he mumbled, "and the tree whose shade I parked in moved."

He was contemplating this absurdity as he strolled into the back yard. He screamed suddenly, as he saw a huge, old oak tree that just plain wasn't there before, looming over the back portion of the cottage.

John stopped screaming once he ran out of breath. But he bolted away instantly thereafter. He wildly ran into the house, dashing past Mary without an explanation. He grabbed the car keys and the checkbook and was out of the house and to the car before she could stop him.

...

John returned from the hardware store with a pair of padded coveralls, a work helmet, and a pair of goggles. He got dressed in these and his work gloves and boots and headed for the storage room where he kept the chainsaw.

"I saw it, John," Mary said worriedly, meeting him at the back door.

He said nothing as he walked through the open door.

"You're going to try again, I see," she stated.

"Yes." He lowered the goggles over his eyes, being careful of the bruised eye. He powered up the saw as he walked down the steps leading from the back porch to the yard. Mary stayed on the porch, like last time.

He gunned the motor a few times and smiled to himself. "No acorns and gusts of wind will get me this time, tree," he growled as he approached the tree.

John was within twenty feet of the trunk when a gust of wind picked up "suddenly" and acorns rained down on him.

"No good, tree. I know that trick already." But as he was nearly upon the tree's trunk, the wind stopped, and the tree (which, by this

time, John believed had a mind of its own) defended itself once again. John did not notice the branches that lowered themselves toward him nor the twigs of those branches that reached out like hands to grasp him.

He gunned the chainsaw's motor again, and the chain had almost contacted the tree's trunk when the twigs, amazingly strong, grabbed the saw and yanked it from his hands. Other twigs restrained John (who watched in horrid fascination), and the ones holding the chainsaw manipulated the controls and turned it off. The branches supporting those twigs proceeded to stretch back and throw the saw a hundred feet away, where it slammed into another tree and broke apart.

John heard Mary's scream as the tree, next, tossed him aside like so much dead weight.

His body crashed to the ground about ten feet away from the tree's boughs. He lay there catching his breath for several moments, fearing bones had been broken and not knowing what to do it any had. Mary was there. "Oh, John," she cried. "Is anything broken?"

He gulped in a breath of air. "I don't know. Help me up."

He rose with her help. She steadied him as he looked toward the tree.

"It's a devil or something," he muttered. "Don't think you've won this fight, you devil!" he yelled at the tree, which did not respond.

She helped him into the house and into bed. "Adding a few bruises to your collection, huh, Mr. Greene?" she teased, trying to break the tension of the moment.

Mr. Greene chuckled humorlessly. He rolled onto his left side, for he had impacted the earth with his right side, which was now very tender.

"And a lot I managed to get done this day, too," he said to himself.

FOUR

John knew it would take a few days of rest before he would even be in shape enough to try another assault on the tree. So he dialed information and located a tree trimming and removal service company, Jorgenson Tree Doctors, and called them. He told them he wanted a tree removed but did not tell them the full details of the job. They would have thought him to be a nut had he done so.

So, the tree doctors were supposedly going to come out and remove the tree two days later.

...

When the team of four men from Jorgenson Tree Doctors arrived the next day and John (wearing sunglasses to hide his bruised eye) limped out to greet them, he intended to direct them to the back yard, where he had last seen the tree. But he saw that the "damned thing" was on the other side of the driveway about

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a hundred yards from the cottage.

"What's it doing out there?" he asked himself as the tree workers piled out of their van. He was sure it was the one, because he had not remembered any trees being in that part of the yard before that morning.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he greeted the workers. "I'm John Greene."

The workers, led by a man named Charlie Dixon, bid good morning to John.

"Which one is it, Jack?" Dixon got to the point.

"That's *John*," John corrected him. He pointed to the tree he had just noticed. "That one."

Dixon came over to him and pointed at the tree, just to verify that he was seeing the same tree. "That one?"

"Yes, Mr. Dixon. That one."

"Please call me *Charlie*," he suggested. "Any particular reason you want that one axed?" Dixon asked. "It's so far from the house it doesn't look like it should be any problem to you."

"I have my reasons, Charlie," John told him. He produced a \$100 bill and handed it to Dixon when the other workers weren't looking. "Just get rid of it," he ordered, watching Dixon pocket the bill.

"Actually, Jack, I don't see that it's any problem for us to remove that tree," the other sucked up, his whole face twitching as he winked at John. Dixon turned toward his crew.

"C'mon, boys, let's get to work!"

John watched as Dixon and his team piled back into their van and drove back down the driveway, stopping about thirty feet from the tree.

When they got out of the van this time, they brought out a lot of equipment, including various ropes, chains, and saws. John slowly limped toward them to inspect how they they would be getting rid of the devil-tree.

He heard the growls of a couple of chainsaws and he slowly approached the crew. He was about forty yards distant when he decided he was close enough.

The growls of the chainsaws turns into roars as two of the workers approached the tree. Then, everything was a blur for a couple of seconds as the devil-tree became animate. John heard several cries of horror and a number of crashes.

John got closer so he could see what was happening.

Charlie Dixon suddenly sailed through the air toward him. He ducked. Dixon landed with a crunch and lay on the ground, groaning ceaselessly.

The other workers were strewn about in different abnormal positions. And their mangled van was setting on one side, most of its windows broken. Their mostly-demolished equipment was scattered in a fifty-yard radius of the devil-tree.

John noticed that all of the tree doctors were unconscious. *Are they my responsibility?* He thought it over for a moment, then reached

into a pocket and brought forth \$300 and a piece of paper on which he scrawled, "*I didn't think it was my responsibility to look after you, even after your van suddenly exploded. But here's some money for your worries.*" He dropped the money and note on Dixon's chest. Then, he turned and limped back to the house.

FIVE

Not surprisingly, after they gathered up their equipment and got a tow truck to haul off their van, the Jorgenson Tree Doctors did not return. And none of them said a word to either of the Greenes.

It was in the afternoon that the last of the Jorgenson debris was cleared away.

Mary was gone, grocery shopping.

John scanned the yard for the devil-tree. "Here, devil-tree, devil-tree," he called in a high-pitched voice as if he were calling a pet. "I have a present for you."

He was holding a can of gasoline and a box of strike-anywhere matches behind his back.

The tree was not out front. So he searched the side yards and then the back before locating the thing in a grove of ten or fifteen other trees.

Could all of them be devil-trees? he was thinking.

"Here, devil-tree," he called again. The huge, old oak did not respond.

John walked closer to the grove, still holding

The gasoline barely splashed onto the huge oak's trunk as a limping John zipped past the tree, still sloshing gasoline all over the place.

the can and box behind his back.

"I have a present for you, witch-spun dead-wood," he snarled, encouraging the tree to attack him.

He unscrewed the gas can's cap and brought the can and box of matches in front of him when he came to within twenty feet of the outermost branches of the devil-tree, which was foremost of the trees of the grove.

He tucked the box of matches into the breast pocket of his workshirt and proceeded to pour gasoline onto the grass in front of where he was standing. Then, he dashed toward the base of the tree, splashing gasoline this way and that. The gasoline barely splashed onto the huge oak's trunk as a limping John zipped past the tree, still sloshing gasoline all over the place.

He dropped the can when he had emptied it and drew forth the box of matches. He was about twenty feet away from the devil-tree, opposite the side at which he had started.

He struck a match on the box. It didn't light, so he tossed it aside.

As John was reaching for a second match, something happened which made him drop the whole box.

The devil-tree uprooted itself! Its five main

roots were like tentacles with smaller tentacles (roots) sprouting off of them. It lifted itself higher and kind of slithered across the ground, away from the gasoline-contaminated area, toward the cottage.

John reacted by grabbing the box of matches and striking one after the other until after six or seven tries, one lit. He stood back and dropped the lit match onto the gasoline-soaked grass near him.

Whoosh! The flames quickly spread toward the escaping devil-tree, but the thing had gotten away from the area the fire was overtaking. The flames consumed the dry grass around the trunks of several stationary trees of the grove.

John reeled in horror. "Omigod. This is like the start of a forest fire."

He almost ran toward the house but then noticed the devil-tree re-rooting itself very close to the back door of the house.

He darted around the blaze and ran toward around to the front of the house. He was just about to call the local fire department when he noticed a dilapidated fire engine, sirens blaring and lights flashing, roaring up the driveway. A dirty, green car was right behind the fire truck.

As the truck rushed past the cottage, John read: "*Alford Volunteer Fire Dept.*," which was emblazoned on the side of the truck. It drove past the end of the driveway and into the back yard.

It stopped, and five firemen, each dressed in a different color of protective suit and hat, climbed out, like a bunch of circus clowns piling out of a VW bug. Four of them snatched a hose out of the back of the truck and rushed around the side, while the fifth turned on

the water.

The blaze had infected all of the trees of the grove (none of which uprooted and fled in panic) and was expanding outward, burning the grass for forty yards around the grove.

But, within fifteen minutes, the rag-tag group of firemen had extinguished the grassfire, and a half an hour after that, the trees had been put out, or rather, their charred remains had been.

...

"You're not from around here," the one who must have been the volunteer fire chief stated as he approached John. "What's your name?"

"I'm John Greene, and I didn't intend for any of this to happen," John sputtered.

"So, you bought the old Fredricks place, eh?" a second fireman asked, pointing his thumb at the cottage.

John nodded. "My wife and I just moved in—" "Do you what the penalty is for setting a forest fire in the state of Massachusetts, Mr. Greene?" the fire chief cut the crap.

"N-no," John stammered, nervously.

"It's a fine of up to \$50,000 and a prison sentence of up to ten years," said the chief.

"Omigod," John uttered.

"But I think in this instance," he said, gesturing toward the charred grove, "it'll probably

be a \$2,000 fine. It's so dry out as it is. That fire could have become a forest fire and burned up the whole damn region. If it wasn't for Harvey here," he pointed his thumb at the scroungy, unshaven man who had gotten out of the dirty, green car, "we wouldn't have gotten here so quick. And that fire would have spread pretty bad."

The filthy man named Harvey grinned, showing his rotten teeth.

"Yah," said a third fireman. "If Harvey hadn't been watching you through his spy-glass, you would have torched the whole neighborhood."

It's nice to know I have a neighbor I can count on, John thought, as he curled his upper lip in a snarl.

...

So, John was issued a citation and was ordered to appear in court two weeks later to argue against receiving the \$2,000 fine.

SIX

When Mary came home, the fire truck and dingy, green car had already left, and the charred remains of the grove looked stark against the setting sun.

"John, what's happened?" she called to him the instant she walked through the door.

He was sitting at the dining room table, thumbing through a fire safety pamphlet that the fire chief had given him.

"Oh, nothing really," he answered, smirking. "But those trees in the back yard?" she was asking.

"You mean those charred ones surrounded by all that burned-up grass?"

"Yes." "Another failure to get rid of that cursed tree," he told her, frowning.

She nodded, understanding. "John, my cousin Alice from Rhode Island has invited us up for the weekend."

"Oh?" "It's been so long since I've seen her. It'll be nice."

"It sounds as if you've already made plans on going," he stated.

"Yes, John. Don't you want to go?"

He shook his head. "I think I'd better stay home and solve this problem before it goes any further."

"But, Honey..." her voice trailed off as John stalked down the hall to the bedroom. He went in and slammed the door, locking it.

...

John contacted Harry Warden, a pal of his from the Army who had "all kinds" of connections.

"Harry, I'm looking for some explosives," John was telling him over the phone. "Believe it or not, I've got a problem removing a tree stump."

"That's no way to get rid of a tree stump, John," Harry told him.

"Trust me. The only tree removal place for

thirty miles around refuses to set foot on my property. And I can't, for the life of me, figure out why." He almost broke into laughter.

"Okay, John. Are you looking for any particular kind of explosive?"

"Not really."

"Then, I'm sure I can find something—something in the \$300 range."

"How soon?"

"How about tomorrow? You can come pick it up at my home."

"Three hundred?"

"Yes, three hundred bucks. It's a costly business."

"Okay. I'll see you tomorrow."

...

So, John, avoiding Mary's queries, drove to Boston, hung around with his old friend for awhile, then left \$300 and took a weighty package home with him.

SEVEN

About a half an hour after Mary had packed

A type-written note was attached to the first stick of dynamite he was getting ready to use. It read: "Light fuse and get away."

for the weekend trip and headed for Rhode Island, John got up and went to work.

He got the package of dynamite, as it was, out from behind his broken chainsaw in the pantry, where he had hidden it the day before.

He set the package on the dining room table, carefully opening it. The cardboard box contained six sticks of dynamite and six fuses. He put the fuses in each stick as he'd seen done in so many war movies and westerns. *What else is there to know about dynamite,* he thought.

After preparing the sticks, which each had a fuse about a foot long, he grabbed a box of matches and headed out the front door.

He ran around the house, as he didn't see the devil-tree out front. There it was, in the back yard, about fifty yards from the house, not far from the charred grove.

"Good morning, you cursed pile of rotten wood," he chided in his high-pitched, pet-calling voice. "It's time for you to go bye-bye."

He moved away from the house, yet stayed at least forty yards from the tree.

A type-written note was attached to the side of the first stick of dynamite he was getting ready to use. It read: "Light fuse and get away."

He set down the box containing the other five sticks and lit a match off of a stone on the ground. He touched the match to the fuse of the first stick. Knowing he was playing with his life by handling explosives, John quickly pitched the ignited explosive toward the devil-tree.

A gust of wind came up and the stick of dynamite sailed into the grove of charred trees.

It detonated seconds later. KA-BOOM!

The explosion knocked John off of his feet. He glanced toward the grove as he rose and shook dust off of himself. Not a charred tree was left standing.

"Well, it's effective," he muttered to himself. "Now, all I have to do is hit the damned thing."

He bent over and picked up a second stick. He lit it and waited a couple seconds, then chucked it at the tree.

The wind came up again and blew the explosive into the ruined grove. It exploded almost on impact, strewing debris further about.

"Grrrr!" John growled. "You're not out of the woods yet!" He grimaced, then chuckled at his words.

He took his box of dynamite and moved closer to the tree. At about thirty yards from the tree he set the box down and selected a third stick, which he almost instantly lit.

He waited a couple seconds and threw it at the tree. The gust of wind came up once again, though not as strong as before, and blew the stick away, up in the air. It exploded about a hundred feet up.

Again, John was knocked down by the blast.

"You're weakening," he muttered to the tree, chuckling, as he picked himself up.

He took a fourth stick out and lit it and threw it without waiting. It was not caught up by a gust of wind, and it landed under the lower branches of the tree.

"You're deadwood!" John exclaimed triumphantly.

But the branches nearest the dynamite drooped toward it, and its twigs extended hastily. It grabbed the explosive and hurled it toward the cottage.

John's eyes went wide in terror, as he heard the breaking of glass, as the stick of dynamite broke through a living room window.

The explosion which followed destroyed the entire cottage. Debris flew outward from the exploding ruin, and something heavy struck John on the head and he fell.

...

Ten minutes later, two sheriff's department cars tore up the driveway, surveyed the wreckage for the longest time. They called an ambulance, and when it came, they took John away.

EIGHT

And having no one left to annoy and terrorize, the huge, old oak uprooted itself that night and found a new home, in the front yard of a huge estate twenty miles away. It rooted itself in the ground about forty feet to the east of the mansion that occupied a spot near the center of that estate. It was just in a spot that would block sunlight from reaching a good portion of the mansion.

...

"Herbert? Herbert?" the woman of the estate called her husband from somewhere within the mansion. "There's a tree in the front yard...." †



Untitled

What I fear most
more than fear itself,
Is that I shall never
Truly find happiness,
And peace.
That I shall never find
That which is eternally sought—
My path and Life's meaning.

That I shall die never contributing
that which should be
inevitable—
Serenity and love—
Expression

Untitled

I think of love
And I weep;
Destruction,
I am sad;
Laughter in a child's eye,
I smile

But when my steps uncontrollably dance,
I laugh
And when my heart flies free,
I shine.



Photography and Poetry
by Laurie Evans